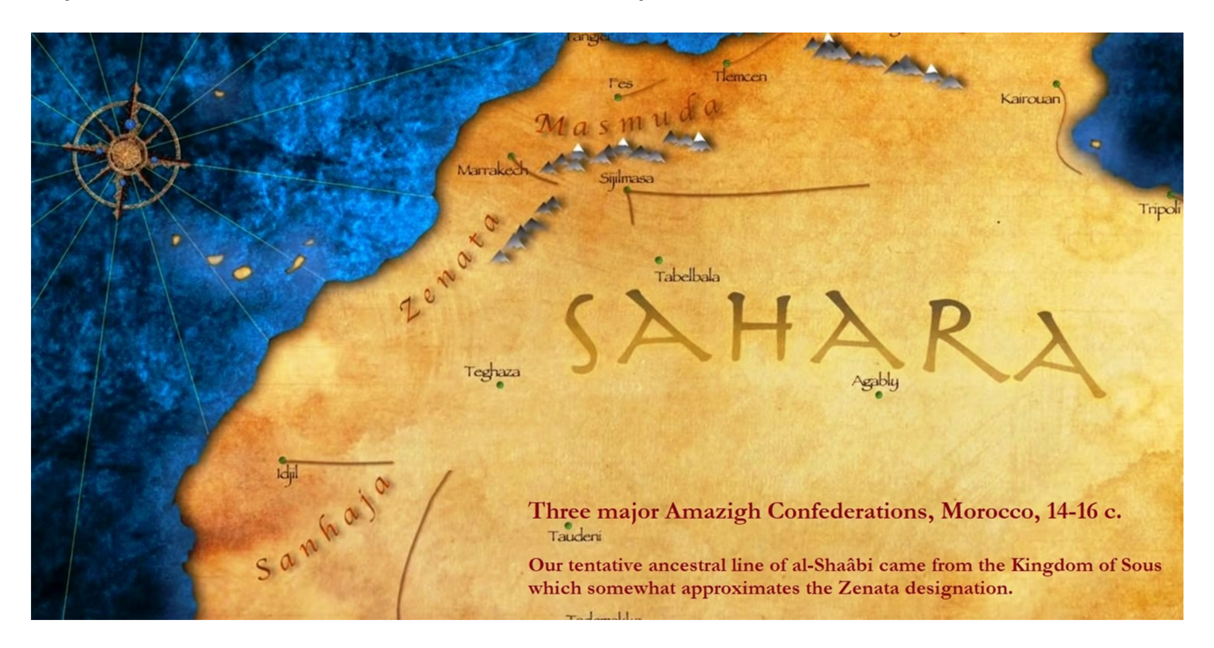
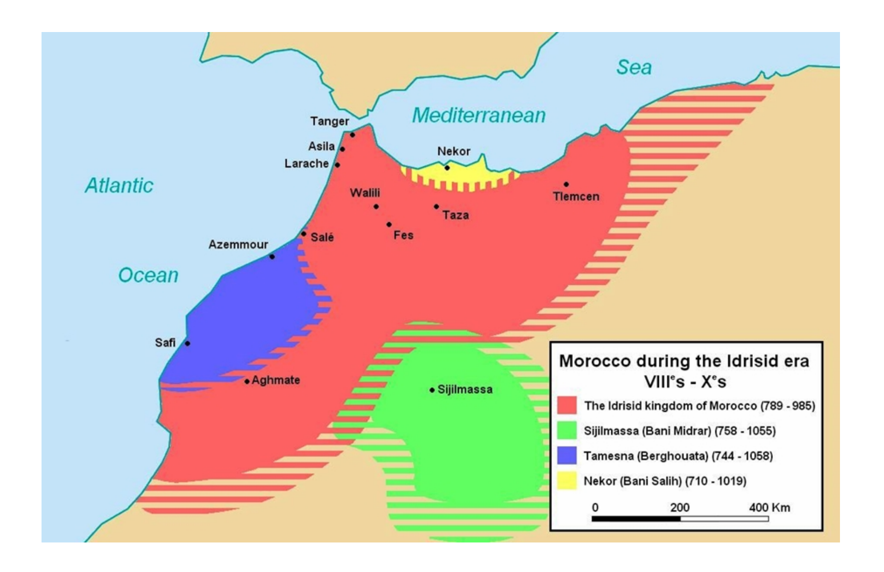
AMAZIGH TRIBES OF NORTHERN AFRICA

Amazigh tribes of Northern Africa stretched from Egypt to Morocco and were grouped into three major confederations: Masmuda, Zenata, and Sanhaja.



1. **MASMUDA**: original settlers of Morocco; gave rise to the **Almohads**. Included 65 tribes:
   a. Barghawata confederacy: also *Berghuota*; consisted of 29 tribes; established Kingdom of Barghawat between Salé and Asfi, 744-1058; conquered by Almoravids;
   b. Ghomara ethnic group with 8 tribes; conquered by Almoravids;
   c. Hhaha confederation: also *Iḥanḥan*; 12 tribes lived between Essaouira and Agadir; conquered by Almoravids. In early 17th century they allied with Zidan in his successful bid to rule all of Morocco;
   d. Singular tribes including the Doukalla tribe: also *Idukalen;* settled north of Asfi to Casablanca; the Hafsids ruled parts of northern Morocco in the 13th century and Iriqiya as Almohad governors from 1127 to 1229 then as an independent state until 1574; Tin Malel; Hergha; Genfisa; Seksiwa; Gedmiwa; Hezerdja; Ourika; Guerouanes; Bni M'tir; Hezmira; Regraga tribe who lived in Essaouira; Beni Magus; Gilawa; and Tehlawa.

   Masmuda occupied the northern third of Morroco by the 14th century; predominated in Kingdom of Fez. The Masmuda lost territory to the later arrivals: the Sanhaja and Zenata confederacies in the 8th & 9th centuries and the Arabic Bedouins tribes in the 10th. The various Masmudean tribes coalesced in the 12th century to form the Almohads who were centered in the north. They overthrew the Almoravids in 1147 and ruled until 1215.



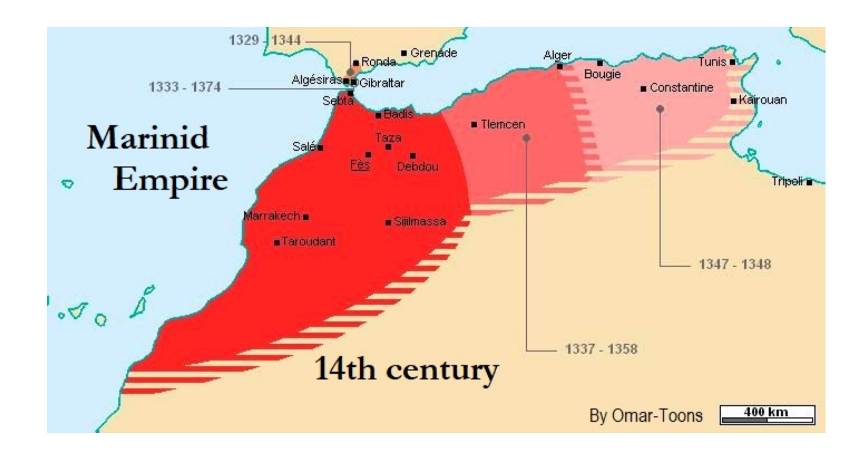
2. **ZENATA**: also *Znata*, *Iznaten*, and *Iznasen*; gave rise to the **Merinid** and **Wattasid** rulers. The most important tribes were:

    a. Jarawa: also *Jrāwa*, *Igrawen* and *Ijrawen*. In 19th century it was proposed that they had converted to Judaism but this has largely fallen from favor; ruled NW Africa before and during 7th century. Opposed Arab Umayyad expansion.

    b. Maghrawa: also *Meghrawa* and *Imeghrawen*. Originated in 10th century in Northern Morocco and Algeria in Dahra region. Embraced Sunni Islam in 7th century and supported the Sunni Idrisids; became Kharijite Muslims in 8th century and supported the Andalusian Umayyads. Ruled the Dahra region in 10th and early 11th centuries as vassals of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba and fought against the Fatimids of Egypt in 924. They changed allegiances to the Fatimids when they had the upper hand but when the Umayyad victory over the Fatimids came, they attempted to ally themselves with the Andalusian Umayyads. The Umayyad response was to attack them using a Sanhaja tribe - the Zirids, who ruled in Algeria. The Maghrawa were expelled from central Morocco and, in turn, they expelled a smaller Zenata tribe, the Miknasa, from Sijilmassa in 980. In less than 20 years, they had returned to the Umayyad fold and conquered Fez. They continued to expand taking the Banu Ifran tribal lands of northern and central Morocco. The Sanhaja Almoravids conquered their lands in 1070.

    c. Banu Ifran: also *Ifranids*. Documented as having fought against Romans, Vandals, and Byzantine armies in North Africa. 8th century kingdom with Tlemcen as capital lost to the Idrisids. Became Kharijite Muslims and supported the Jarawa in their opposition to the Arab Umayyads and later the Abbasids. Gained control of Tadla province in central Morocco and, as they expanded towards the coast, they established a new capital at Salé. This brought them into conflict with the Masmudean Barghawata confederacy already in and around Salé. Founded the Andalusian Taifa of Ronda in 1039 which continued for several centuries. However, in the Maghreb, they too were defeated by the Almoravids in 1070 after being weakened by the depredations visited upon them by the Maghrawa.

The Zenata were the first of the three confederations to adopt Islam in the 7th century; the Maghrawa adopted Sunni Islam at first then rejected it for the Kharijites while the Banu Ifran adopted the Kharijites, never embracing Sunni Islam. Central Morocco was the base area after the 15th century.



3. **SANHAJA**: also *Aẓnag* and *Aẓnaj*. Lamtuna tribe gave rise to the **Almoravids**; Banu Zaydan gave rise to the **Saadians**. Largest confederation stretching into Sudan and Niger and all across North Africa. Originated in Sub-Saharan Africa and were displaced north into the desert by other tribes. Their adoption of Islam was tinged with retained earlier beliefs.
   a. Godala tribe: By 9th century occupied the Middle Atlas, Rif Mountains down to the Atlantic Coast in Southern Morocco.
   b. Kutâma tribe: occupied a large area of central Algeria.
   c. Zirids and Hammâdids: controlled the area now Tunisia until the 12th century. Known for bringing Sufism to the area and establishing many *zawiya* or Sufi schools. Were instrumental in the Fatimid conquest in Egypt in 909.
   d. Lamtuna tribe: followed the teachings of the Malikite school of law as taught by Abdallah Ibn Yasin; the followers gave rise to the Almoravids.
   e. Hintata tribe: founded Marrakesh in 1062 which became the Almoravid capital.
   f. Banu Zaydan tribe: originated in Tidzi and moved to Taroudant, inland from Agadir, as their power grew. By 1509 they were the strongest tribe in Sous and established their Saadian principality in Tagmadert in that year. They stayed there until 1550 when the Saadi became Emirs of Morocco and moved to Marrakesh with the consent of the ruling Hintata tribe.

   The Sanhaja were centered in the Kingdoms of Sous and Marrakesh in southern Morocco by the 16th century. The Almoravids expanded eastward taking Algiers and northward retaking, by 1086, much of the Iberian Peninsula taifas that had been lost since the Caliphate fractured in 1031.

MARJARIT BINT ABDERAHMAN, now believed to be the name of the second wife of JAN JANSEN VAN HAARLEM's second wife, is said to have been Amazigh. Which tribe she belonged to has not been named in any sources found to date. The Muslim population of Cartagena were, by and large, from the Sanhaja tribes but one source has stated that the "Saadian" archives contains a record that states MARJARIT was from a Masmudean tribe.